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ABSTRACT

The main conditions necessary for the successful introduction of the early teaching of modern languages (ETML) are outlined. The processes that are usually involved in the introduction of ETML into a country or region are listed. Obstacles to the successful introduction of ETML and the role of European cooperation in overcoming obstacles are also discussed. In the appendix, a model is presented for differentiating among the methods and aims needed by children of varying ability. (SW)

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"THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS"

by

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Before considering possible obstacles to the introduction of the early teaching of modern languages, these notes suggest the main conditions for success in this activity and the principal stages in the process of introducing ETML into any given educational system.

1. THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

1.1 Clarity of long-term educational aims:

The overall educational strategies concerned with ETML must be clearly defined, so that teachers and administrators can base their work on firm answers to such questions as the following:

1.11 Will ETML improve the children's attitudes towards other nations?

1.12 Will ETML help to develop the children's self-confidence, communicative powers and understanding of the nature of language?

1.13 Can ETML be planned in such a way that it makes a positive contribution to the primary curriculum?

1.14 Can ETML help children who are in a multilingual situation by enabling them to increase their ability to communicate with members of their peer-group who speak a different language?

1.15 Which language or languages are primary schools to offer? For what educational or practical reasons?

1.2 Clear definition of short-term objectives:

Success will depend on clearly defined objectives, related as precisely as possible to the children's varied needs and abilities. These day-to-day objectives will affect such practical matters as the content of the course, the levels of achievement aimed at for different children, time-allocation and methods of teaching.

1.3 An administrative framework must be created or adapted to meet the following needs:

1.31 Financial support is essential.

1.32 Teacher-supply must be adequate.

1.33 Teacher-support services must be set up to provide advice, supervision, initial and in-service training, resource centres and information centres.

1.34 The responsible authorities must agree to the introduction of the scheme, and in particular primary head teachers must agree to make an adequate allocation of time to ETML.

1.35 Continuity of teaching as between primary and secondary schools must be ensured.

1.36 The scheme should include built-in provision for the assessment of the children's progress and for an overall evaluation of the ETML project.

1.4 Pedagogical needs

1.41 Co-ordination of modern language teaching with the rest of the primary curriculum must be encouraged.

1.42 All teachers participating in the scheme, whether in primary or secondary schools, should reach agreement on basic pedagogical principles.

1.43 "Individualisation" of content and teaching methods must be practised to the greatest possible extent. Remembering that "nothing succeeds like success", teachers must organise their work to ensure that each individual child has a sense of growing achievement in performing tasks which are possible for him personally and which form a series of graded steps towards mastery of certain sectors of the target language. There is a need for a minimal programme which can be expanded for the more able children.

1.44 Questions of mixed and homogeneous classes in ETML demand careful consideration and research based on experience; this work should include the study of individual and group behaviour.

1.45 Materials, equipment and the general conditions within which the teacher works must be satisfactory.

2. THE INTRODUCTION OF ETML INTO AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Without adequate societal support it will be difficult, if not impossible, for a country to provide the above-mentioned conditions for success. Provided that there is sufficient national motivation for the necessary finances to be allocated and for the necessary measures to be taken, the introduction of ETML into any one country or region will usually involve the following processes:

2.1 Assessment of the value of ETML for the education of individual children and for the benefit of the community in general.

2.2 Estimate of the financial commitments involved in the introduction and effective continuation of ETML.

2.3 Policy decisions and the allocation of the necessary funds.

2.4 Provision of an administrative framework, bearing in mind particularly the need for continuity, and using existing resources and personnel where possible.

2.5 Provision of sufficient numbers of suitably qualified teachers.

2.6 Provision of teaching resources specially designed for ETML and for continuity between the primary and secondary stages.

2.7 Arrangements for assessment as mentioned at 1.36 above.

3. OBSTACLES TO THE SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTION OF ETML

This list of problems is offered not as a deterrent but as an indication that successful ETML depends on careful planning and on the provision of adequate teaching resources.

3.1 Intellectual obstacles

The basic philosophy of ETML, its long-term aims and its short-term objectives may not have been clearly formulated. As a result, policy decisions may be based on unsound assumptions and resources may be dissipated in unsuitable or counter-productive efforts. (See especially 3.52 below.)

3.2 Financial obstacles

Failure to provide sufficient funds may lead to the following difficulties:

3.21 Constraints may be placed on research and evaluation.

3.22 Inadequate measures may be taken for the supply, training and counselling of teachers.

3.23 There may be insufficient provision of materials and equipment.

3.24 Administrative support may be inadequate, with the resulting difficulties detailed in 3.3 below.

3.3 Administrative obstacles

3.31 Attempts to create continuity of teaching between primary and secondary schools may fail, either through inadequate teacher training facilities or owing to insufficient numbers of advisory staff in some countries.

3.32 The authorities concerned may not have been convinced of the necessity for providing sufficient lesson-time for ETML within the normal school day.

3.33 There may not be enough opportunities for teachers and children to make contact with the relevant foreign countries and their ways of life.

3.34 There may be inadequate provision for the evaluation of the ETML scheme and of the children's progress.

3.4 Sociological obstacles

3.41 The national or regional community may not set a high priority on the teaching of modern languages, especially to younger children. A negative communal attitude has adverse effects on motivation and on the provision of finance.

3.42 For historical or political reasons there may be negative attitudes on a local or national scale towards a particular foreign language. In some cases, this difficulty might be countered by the selection of another language for ETML, but see the "compensatory" point made in DECS/EGT (75) 67 paragraph 3.42.

3.43 Parents in lower socio-economic groups may regard foreign language learning as inessential for their children, and they may therefore not encourage their children in ETML activities. A variation of this difficulty may be for foreign languages to be regarded as appropriate for girls but not for boys. Such phenomena may be regional, arising mainly in areas remote from linguistic frontiers. Again, a different point of view is indicated in DECS/EGT (75) 67, at paragraph 3.43.

3.5 Psychological and physiological obstacles

3.51 Prejudices against ETML may be held as a personal matter by influential individuals such as administrators, head teachers, class teachers and parents, inducing negative attitudes in the children. The children themselves may unfortunately hold irrational prejudices derived from misleading stereotypes of national characteristics propagated by the mass media.

3.52 Even in an ambiance of positive attitudes towards ETML, children may lack adequate motivation if they do not experience a sense of growing mastery of the foreign language. This sense of achievement depends in turn on the provision of appropriate and graded learning objectives which are within the reach of the individual child. The appendix to this paper attempts to provide a basis for discussion about the possibilities of "individualisation".

3.53 The children themselves may suffer from psychological or physiological obstacles, eg shyness, prejudice, deafness, inexperience of oral communication in the mother tongue.

3.6 Pedagogical obstacles

3.61 Most pedagogical difficulties will stem from the obstacles already mentioned. Such obstacles, especially of a sociological or psychological nature, can often be overcome, at least in part, by the creation of a favourable teaching situation resulting from an attractive teaching personality combined with the teacher's enthusiasm, verve, skill and access to suitable materials and equipment. Where such elements are lacking, the prevailing atmosphere may unfortunately remain predominantly negative.

3.62 The weekly allocation of time for ETML may be inadequate or may be unevenly distributed.

3.63 The relationship between ETML and the rest of the primary curriculum may not have been clearly defined. This may in turn lead to a neglect of opportunities for the integration of ETML with work in other subjects such as art, music, history and geography.

4. TO WHAT EXTENT CAN EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION HELP TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO THE INTRODUCTION OF ETML?

4.1 Stress can be laid on international idealism as a motivating force for teachers, parents and administrators, in the belief that their resulting positive attitudes will influence the children's own outlook on ETML.

4.2 The CCC might develop still further its existing encouragement of the pooling and dissemination, eg by encouraging countries to publish details of successful projects by means of broadsheets, films or videotapes. European stimulus might also lead to more effective evaluation of equipment, materials and teaching methods.

4.3 The CCC's existing encouragement for international contacts might be continued and even intensified in relation to ETML. The atmosphere of positive encouragement which the CCC engenders for linguistic initiatives and achievements is widely recognised as a valuable matrix for future developments.

4.4 The CCC might commission a study of the relations between ETML and modern primary school methods based on discovery and creativity.

4.5 The CCC might launch a project on the "individualisation" of work in ETML.

4.6 Work in ETML might be linked with the basic principles of "The Threshold Level".

A P P E N D I X

DIFFERENT AIMS FOR DIFFERENT CHILDREN

One of the most urgent problems in ETML is that of differentiating suitably among the aims and methods needed by children of varying ability. The following model is offered only as a basis for discussion and with all the reservations appropriate to a highly simplistic scheme. The diagram is obviously influenced by the table on p.2 of "The Threshold Level".

In the following table, the five horizontal divisions represent sectors of the "general ability" range from the 100th percentile (highest ability) to the 5th percentile (lowest ability compatible with ETML). The vertical divisions represent the aims of modern language learning as defined at the Ostia Symposium and repeated at the Wiesbaden Symposium, ie:

WAY OF LIFE	=	knowledge of the life, culture and civilisation of the foreign country
HEARING	=	understanding speech at normal speed
SPEAKING	=	speaking the language intelligibly
READING	=	reading with ease and understanding
WRITING	=	expression in writing

These five aims have been retained for the sake of simplicity in this instance although it is appreciated that the "Threshold Level" suggests a new analysis of performance, situationally based, which may eventually lead to a restatement of the Ostia formula. In the context of ETML these skills would be the end-products of a 3 or 4 year course, and would not be developed to the same extent in all children.

The letters A, B, C, D and E represent levels of achievement, defined for the present purpose as follows:

A. Children's version of the Threshold Level.

B. Children's version of the "halfway level" (see "The Threshold Level", p.8).

C. The level, or series of levels, which might reasonably be attained by children around the average of general ability and taught by efficient methods in a favourable teaching situation.

D. Some knowledge of the foreign country, together with the power to understand and respond to simple questions and remarks spoken in the foreign language.

E. A trace of knowledge of the foreign country, with a slight ability to recognise a selection of phrases and proper names spoken in a foreign language.

The resultant grid might be as follows. Blank spaces represent nil aims and nil achievements:

ABILITY RANGE	WAY OF LIFE	HEARING	SPEAKING	READING	WRITING
100-80	A	A	B	A	A
80-60	B	B	B	B	B
60-40	C	C	C	C	C
40-20	D	D	D		
20-5	E	E			

How might these aims be applied in practice? The following suggestions might be applied by one teacher with a single class, or by several teachers working on "team-teaching" lines with a number of classes.

1. A story is presented, with the support of pictures and possibly mimed movements, by the teacher. The story might deal with an incident in a café.

2. A group of more able children might then be given a second version of the story, presented in greater detail.

3. "Follow-up" activities in speaking, reading and writing, might be differentiated thus as between homogeneous groups:

Group I: Acting out the story with variations and/or a sequel. Written summary in the foreign language. (A very able group.)

Group II: Acting the story as given, with a simple written reproduction afterwards. (An above average group.)

Group III: Answering oral (and possibly written) questions in the target language. (A group of average ability.)

Group IV: Repeating key phrases in the target language. (A below average group.)

Group V: Retelling the story in the native language. (A group of low ability.)

(In the notes on the above groups I-II, the term "ability" clearly covers many elements in a child's powers and achievements in language learning, including general intelligence, previous experience of language study, and attitudes towards foreign languages and their speakers.)

A more complex teaching procedure would be for a class to be organised in mixed ability groups. The symposium may wish to discuss this possibility.